



Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women



Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women Annual Report May 2020

Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women ~ Members

Mary Bridget Burns ~ Sturbridge
Amy Ebbeson ~ Rutland
Irene Rodriguez- Hernandez ~Gardner
Jill Kasten ~ Worcester
Suzanne Lewandowski ~ North Brookfield
Jacqueline McLean ~ Shrewsbury
Michelle Miller ~ Westminster
Tonisha Pinckney ~ Leominster
Randi Zanca ~Northbridge

The following were nominated and elected as officers:

Amy Ebbeson ~ Chair
Mary Bridget Burns ~ Vice Chair
Randeem Zanca~ Secretary (note taker)

Advisory Board Members

Judith Ockene ~ Harvard
Chantel Bethea ~ Worcester
Joyce McNickles- Sutton

Purpose:

The purpose of the Commission is to advance women toward full equity in all areas of life. We promote rights and opportunities for women and girls of every race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, ability, age and sexual orientation. We are grounded in the belief that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. The mission of the Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women is to act as an effective voice for women in the County of Worcester to ensure their equal status in educational, economic, political, health, legal, and social spheres. The commission does this by holding forums and events designed to promote fundamental freedoms, basic human rights, and the full

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enjoyment of life for all women through the provision of information, feedback collection, referrals, guidance and community organizing. We build connections to other agencies that serve the needs of women and girls and hold collaboration and cooperation as core values.

Membership:

This program year included Amy Ebbeson [statement needed]

Mary Bridget Burns [statement needed]

Irene Rodriguez- Hernandez [statement needed]

Randi Zanca is an adjunct professor of English at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester and is always concerned about women, their higher education, how they pay for it, and how they manage to stay in college with so many other pressures in their lives.

Jacqueline McLean [statement needed]

In this program year, the commission experienced membership changes due to term limits. Joann Stemmermann of Bolton, MA completed her term and did not seek another as she and her family were moving out of state. Judith Ockene and Chantel Bethea also reached their term limits but continue as members of the Advisory Council. They were both highly engaged and did not want to leave projects uncompleted. We benefit enormously from their leadership, knowledge base and social networks and appreciate their ongoing commitment to the WCCSW. We continue to use the Advisory Council to support the larger commission and have added Joyce McNickles to our Advisory Committee ranks. She holds a Ed. D in Adult Education and has an extensive record of advocating for racial justice and women's empowerment. She was a founding member of the Massachusetts Women of Color Coalition and serves on the Attorney General's Task Force Against Bias and Hate.

We added **three** new members recommended by the statewide Commission. Dr. Tonisha Pinckney is a professor of Criminal Justice and serves in numerous capacities to empower women, especially women of color impacted by violence and abuse. She is a member of the National Alliance for Mental Illness and a celebrated author. Jill Kasten has worked at both ends of the life cycle, originally working with young moms in childbirth education, she now serves the elder population. Her experiences have given our commission valuable insight into the needs of women as they enter motherhood and as they face health and economic challenges in later years. Michelle Miller directs the Center for Women and Enterprise and brings experience in economic development and entrepreneurship. All three of these women were appointed in January and have made significant contributions to our Commission in the short time they have been with us.

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Hearings/Public Forums:

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Investing in Girls Alliance- Worcester County CSW participated in the Seventh Annual Statewide Gathering - May 17th, 2019 in Sturbridge, MA.

The Investing in Girls Alliance (IIGA) is an unprecedented collaboration to address the challenges girls face in the crucial middle-school transition years. IIGA's mission is to improve services for middle school girls in central Massachusetts through research, education, advocacy, and collaboration. The ultimate vision of the Investing in Girls Alliance is that all girls grow up to be happy, healthy, and productive women. In order to achieve our mission, we focus on three priority areas. Physical, Mental and Sexual Health are core to girls' well-being and good health provides the foundation for achievements throughout her lifetime. Education and Economic Empowerment gives girls the tools and opportunities they need to oversee their lives and actively engage in their families and communities. Addressing issues of Violence and Safety is fundamental to girls' success; we must ensure the safety of girls where they grow, learn, work and play. The work of IIGA centers around four key strategies; Data and Research to effectively measure the wellbeing of local girls and understand their current and emerging needs, Public Education to raise community awareness of the unique needs, assets and challenges of middle school aged girls, Promoting Best Practices through networked training and peer sharing and Advocacy to secure gender equitable policies and sufficient resources for girls by aligning with like partners across the state including the MA Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.

Women's Advocacy Day at the Statehouse 5/21/19

Unsung Heroine Awards- 6/18/19

Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women – Fourth Annual Legislative Breakfast September 9th 2019

The meeting included breakfast, networking, and a panel discussion among local elected officials and experts on policy issues impacting women's issues.

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Semi Annual Convening at Worcester Academy 12/19/19

Virtual Public Hearing 4/2/20

Additional Activities:

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Erskine Awards
EPIC Service Warriors Launch
Behavioral Health Listening Sessions w/ Marylou Sudders
No Small Matter Screening 9/19
DayBreak Breakfast 10/7
SHINE Gala 10/10
Workplace Bullying Conference 10/18
Self Care Fair at LIFT
Together for Kids
LIFT/ Jana's Place Opening
Turn off the Red Light Summit 11/20/19
Chantel Bethea for School Committee
AG's Human Trafficking Summit 1/16 & 1/17/20
Black Women and Violence Forum at Clark University 3/10/20
Building and Sustaining Hope- Virtual Suicide Prevention Conference

Worcester County CSW participated in the CHIP (community health improvement plan)

Vision:

Greater Worcester is a great place to be born, grow up, learn, live, work, raise a family, grow and participate in community life.

International Women's Day is a worldwide event celebrating the achievements of women while calling for greater equality.

Conclusion:

The world remains far from equitable in its distribution of resources. The women of Worcester County have a lot of work to do to achieve the potential and full equality of all women. Like everyone else, the pandemic has caused us to need to pivot and direct our attention on the immediate needs of women in Worcester County. Prior to the introduction of covid- 19, we were planning a forum on Healthy Sexuality. In our region, sex education has been removed from schools. We know that a lack of information about sex and consent contributes greatly to sexual abuse and other poor outcomes for girls and women such as early pregnancy and exploitive relationships. The suggested curriculums also don't address gender identity or sexual orientation and we believe that girls need access to

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comprehensive sex education to make informed choices about their future. This aligns with the work on passing the Healthy Youth Act.

Priority Issues identified:

- Mental health
- Health care navigation, available services, transportation to services, appeal process when service is denied
- Culturally Competent/ Appropriate Services
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse/ Rape
- Economics for women- Jobs, Financial literacy
- Childcare, Child hunger – WIC
- Immigrant women
- Education (pre-k through college)
 - Stem pipeline
 - Head-start
- Teen pregnancy
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Seniors
- Veterans

Goals for 2020 - 2021

1. Collaborate with the Mass CSW and Regional Commissions to hold more public hearings in order to raise awareness of critical issues facing women in Massachusetts and to grow the participation and involvement of individual and organizational allies in the work of advancing equity for women of Massachusetts.
2. Maintain regular contact with our legislators and officials on issues that concern women that have been identified as our priority areas of focus.
3. Continue to collaborate with other organizations, and public officials, in order to support women and girls through public awareness.
4. Work closely with our sister commissions on implementing and developing best practices for the betterment of each commission.
5. Work on writing and proposing new state level legislative policies for women.

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6. Attend community events and share literature about the commission to promote awareness of our role and work to increase involvement in our activities.

Submitted by the Worcester County CSW

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